



Natural Resources Conservation Service
655 Parfet Street, Room E200C
Lakewood, Colorado 80215

May 24, 2005

GENERAL MANUAL
180 – CPA
AMENDMENT CO-04 – (Part 409)

SUBJECT: CPA – CONSERVATION PLANNING POLICY

Purpose: To amend the procedures for Conservation Planning Policy.

Effective Date: This Amendment is effective upon receipt.

Explanation: This Amendment adds to the General Manual 180-CPA, Part 409 that provides State policy for the procedures that will be used in Conservation Planning Policy for certification.

Filing Instructions: Remove and Insert the following.

Remove and dispose of Colorado Planning Policy Amendment CO409.0 through CO409.8, dated September 2002; Exhibits CO409-9 through CO409-20 dated September 2002.

Insert the Conservation Planning Policy Amendment CO409.03(g) through CO409.20 Exhibit A, B, C, D, E, F, pages CO409-1 through CO409-23.

/s/

ALLEN GREEN
State Conservationist

Attachment

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CO409i(1)

SUBPART A – CONSERVATION PLANNING POLICY

CO409.09(g)

§ CO409.0 General.

(a) This amendment provides specific guidance on the process and standards used by NRCS in Colorado to meet National NRCS policy requirements regarding conservation planning assistance to clients.

§ CO409.03 Requirements for providing conservation planning assistance in Colorado.

(a) All District Conservationists and GS-9 and higher field conservationists with planning responsibilities shall obtain conservation planner certification in Colorado. Only certified planners may approve and sign conservation plans on the last page utilizing the certified planner rubber stamp and signing on the line. Other positions may be required to obtain certification, as well. Supervisors will determine this on a case-by-case basis. All GS-9 and higher employees who have conservation planning responsibilities are required to be certified conservation planners. Employees may continue to perform conservation planning without certification during this time.

Conservation district and other partner agency employees working under the guidance of NRCS must also obtain conservation planner certification if they have planning responsibilities.

Colorado NRCS has established one level of conservation planner certification, differentiated by land use. A planner may be certified for one or more of the seven major land uses: the planner must be certified for a land use in order to perform planning on that land use, unless planning is performed under the supervision of a Certified Conservation Planner who is certified to plan on that land use.

§ CO409.09 Minimum requirements for certification as a conservation planner are detailed in.

(g) Colorado NRCS has also established Planning and Practice Approval Authority (PPAA) for all employees engaged in providing conservation technical assistance. This policy also applies to conservation district or other partner agency employees performing work under the guidance of NRCS.

Conservation planning involves more than consideration of individual resources. It focuses on the natural systems and ecological processes that sustain the resources. A conservation planner strives to balance natural resource issues with economic and social needs through the development of a Resource Management System (RMS). The PPAA process ensures that qualified practitioners address conservation planning and application issues in all phases of the work, from overall conservation plan development to planning and application of individual conservation practices.

CO409-1

CO409.09(g)(1)(e)

The PPAA Worksheets document practitioner proficiency levels attained as a result of demonstrated knowledge, skill, and ability.

An approved PPAA must be in place, assigning job approval levels, before conducting any planning activity without supervision. There are two parts to the PPAA. Section I [CO409.20 Exhibit A] outlines minimum criteria that must be met for conservation planner certification in Colorado. Section II [CO409.20 Exhibit B] is used to document desired and attained proficiency levels for all conservation practices that are identified as being important in the employee's work area. For engineering practices, job approval authority is documented in greater detail on Form CO-ENG-9, Colorado Engineering Job Approval Authority. All field personnel involved in providing conservation technical assistance shall complete Section II. Section I will be completed only for those employees who need or wish to become Certified Conservation Planners.

(1) Conservation Planner Certification in Colorado

(a) A planner will be designated as a Certified Conservation Planner when the planner meets the minimum requirements in CO409.09 (recorded in Sections I and II of the PPAA Worksheets) and demonstrates the ability to effectively assist clients in implementing the planning process. Employees who are not certified planners may continue to plan only under the supervision of a certified planner and cannot approve or sign conservation plans.

(b) Planner certification and PPAA shall be based on an individual's training, experience, and demonstrated proficiency. Proficiency is determined from a review of specific work products prior to receiving job approval authority.

(c) Practitioners need a PPAA only for those planning activities and conservation practices they are expected to encounter in their current assignment or designated geographic work area. It is not intended for anyone to have approvals for all planning activities and conservation practices. A change in duty location or geographic work area may require a change in the PPAA.

(d) An employee without a PPAA will have work supervised or reviewed by an employee with appropriate approval authorities. In addition, the lack of a PPAA for a given practice does not preclude the responsible field office employee from signing cost-share referrals when that practice has been planned, designed, and certified as applied by others with appropriate PPAA.

(e) All conservation practice installations shall be certified by an individual with proficiency rating of "4 - Plan/Apply Independently" for the practice(s) being certified. Certification is accomplished by a statement of acceptance with signature.

(f) The PPAA makes no reference, in most cases, to the complexity or units of a practice or conservation planning unit (i.e., feet, acres). At the discretion of the PPAA recommending official, however, reference to complexity limitations may be made and will be included on the PPAA worksheets. For engineering practices, job approval authorities will be documented in greater detail on Form CO-ENG-9, Colorado Engineering Job Approval Authority.

(g) The Area Conservationist, with approval of the State Resource Conservationist, shall document that minimum requirements for conservation planner certification have been met in Section I of the PPAA. Area Conservationists, with approval of the State Resource Conservationist, shall establish minimum performance requirements and document KSA levels achieved for conservation practice planning and application in Section II of the PPAA. Requirements shall be based on what is appropriate for practitioners in the current duty location. For employees, this will usually coincide with the boundaries of the field office. Form CO-ENG-9, Colorado Engineering Job Approval Authority, will supplement the information in Section II for engineering practices.

(h) The State Resource Conservationist and the State Conservation Engineer will determine what PPAA levels may be appropriate for state specialists involved in conservation planning, planning support, training, or quality assurance activities.

(i) To ensure the consistent review of conservation plans and approval levels for practitioners directly involved in conservation planning efforts, the Conservation Plan Review Worksheet [CO409.20 Exhibit C] shall be used.

(j) The PPAA worksheets will be reviewed and updated at least annually for agency or partner agency employees when training needs are evaluated. The PPAA resides with the supervisor and is filed together with the employee's engineering job approval authority. The employee is provided a copy.

(2) Process for assigning approval authorities through the PPAA.

(a) PPAA Section I, Conservation Planner Certification.

(i) Planning approval authorities for NRCS field office staff and partner employees are recommended by the District Conservationist, concurred with by the Area Conservationist, and approved by the State Resource Conservationist, based on National/Colorado policy and the requirements for proficiency demonstration listed in Section I of the PPAA.

(ii) District Conservationists' and Area staffs' planning approval authorities are recommended by the Area Conservationist and approved by the State Resource Conservationist.

CO409.09(d)

(iii) State specialists' planning approval authorities are recommended jointly by the State Resource Conservationist and the State Conservation Engineer and approved by the State Conservationist.

(b) PPAA Section II, Conservation Practice Certification.

(i) Conservation practice approval authorities for NRCS field office staff and partner employees are recommended by the District Conservationist, concurred with by the Area Conservationist, and approved by the State Resource Conservationist, based on National/Colorado policy and the requirements for proficiency demonstration recorded in Section II of the PPAA.

(ii) District Conservationists' practice approval authorities are recommended by the Area Conservationist and approved by the State Resource Conservationist.

(iii) Area specialists' practice approval authorities are recommended by the Area Conservationist and approved by the State Resource Conservationist.

(iv) State specialists' practice approval authorities are recommended by the State Resource Conservationist and/or the State Conservation Engineer, depending on the practice, and approved by the State Conservationist.

§ CO409.09 Minimum criteria for designation as a Certified Conservation Planner in Colorado
The following are the minimum criteria for designation as a Certified Conservation Planner in Colorado.

(a) Candidates must complete all modules (1-9) of the NRCS Conservation Planning course or equivalent, as determined by the State Conservationist in consultation with the Director of the National Employee Development Center. Part 1 (Modules 1-5) and Part 2 (Modules 6-8) must be completed with a minimum test score of 80%. The State Conservationist may provide a written waiver for Part 2 for persons who have previously demonstrated competence in RMS plan development. No waivers will be granted for Part 1. Part 3 (Module 9) deals with individual development of an RMS plan for a client and is discussed below in section (d).

(b) Candidates must possess and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities identified in Sections I and II of the PPAA.

(c) In addition to the above, candidates for certification will be required to obtain supervisor recommendation for certification. This is recorded on the PPAA worksheets.

(d) Candidates for certification must complete at least one field reviewed conservation plan that addresses at least one Conservation Management Unit (CMU). Planning

CO409-4

must be at the RMS level, unless the client is not ready to commit to RMS level management. In that case, RMS level alternatives must be presented to the client and included in the plan. The candidate will be accompanied to the field by the State Conservationist's designee to meet with the decisionmaker (landowner or operator). The candidate will be expected to demonstrate competency in the planning process and plan development. The observer will evaluate the candidate's interaction with the decisionmaker in the planning process and whether all resource concerns associated with the CMU have been adequately addressed. Field reviewed plans must be approved by the State Conservationist or designee prior to final delivery to the decisionmaker. Once approved, the certified conservation planner will receive a certificate and stamp for use on conservation plans prepared or approved by the certified planner.

Planners will be certified according to the land use(s) on which they have demonstrated competency in planning. The designated land uses are: Irrigated Crop, Nonirrigated Crop, Range, Wildlife, Pasture/Hay, Forest, and Urban.

(e) NRCS and partner agency Certified Conservation Planners are responsible for keeping their own Individual Development Plans updated to reflect training needed and completed. A minimum of 60 hours of training must be obtained over a three-year period in order to maintain the Certified Conservation Planner designation. Continuing education units (CEUs) may be earned by attending formal courses or informal workshops, meetings, conferences, field days, etc., where appropriate subject matter is presented. CEUs may also be earned through formal certification or informal education programs offered by other organizations such as professional societies, public agencies, or private organizations. Credits should be earned in a variety of disciplines reflecting the breadth and depth of knowledge, skills, and abilities that must be utilized in performing conservation planning work. Qualifying CEU presentations may address topics such as: interpersonal communication, conservation biology, landscape ecology, watershed management, water quality BMPs, agronomy, bioengineering, weed management, soil science, geology, hydrology, plant materials, engineering, environmental law, community planning, economics, sociology, GIS, etc. Supervisors (District Conservationists or Area Conservationists, as appropriate) and the State Resource Conservationist, must concur that the training qualifies as continuing education for the purpose of maintaining planner certification. Normally, one hour of formal presentation (classroom, professional conference, workshop, business meeting, etc.) on a topic pertinent to conservation planning or conservation practice planning and application will count as one CEU. Field tours may be credited at a rate of three (3) hours of tour time to one (1) CEU. The State Conservationist reserves the right to modify the CEU requirements at any time. Training will be documented in the employee's Individual Development Plan. Documentation is the responsibility of the certified conservation planner. Periodic spot checks will be performed to assess compliance with the CEU requirement. Certified individuals must track their CEUs on Exhibit F – Continuing Education Units Tracking Form or a detailed CEU Statement from State approved certification programs and has it available at time of recertification review.

(f) Colorado's Quality Assurance Plan will address maintenance of the conservation planner certification process, as well as individual certification designation. Certified

CO409.10(2)(c)(7)

Conservation Planner designations are subject to review annually. At a minimum, the State Resource Conservationist will review them at least once every three years. A sufficient number of conservation plans will be reviewed to determine that the conservation plans meet NRCS planning policy and comply with the procedures and guidelines contained in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook and the Colorado Field Office Technical Guide. If an individual fails to meet the criteria for the Certified Conservation Planner designation, the status will be revoked and the individual must be re-certified. If planning on a particular land use is determined to be unsatisfactory, planning certification for that land use may be revoked, and the individual must be re-certified on that land use. An individual may be decertified on one land use, while retaining certification for other land uses.

Reviews resulting in decertification may be the product of the periodic (i.e., at least once every three years) Resource Management System (RMS) plan review, the Quality Assurance process or a request by the planner's supervisor. The decertification process will parallel the certification process in that the District Conservationist and/or Area Conservationist may recommend the action. The State Resource Conservationist retains final approval authority. There is no appeal process. To be re-certified, an individual must demonstrate performance and compliance with the requirements of CO409.09, including those set out in the PPAA.

§ CO409.10 Minimum standards for Providers of Conservation Technical Assistance Associated with Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP) in Colorado.

(2) Requirements Specific to Elements of a CNMP.

(c) Nutrient Management.

(5) To provide conservation planning assistance in nutrient management, it is not required to be a certified nutrient management specialist but for any plans to be approved they must be reviewed and signed by a Certified Nutrient Management Specialist (*GM190 Part 402 – Nutrient Management*). Required training and knowledge has been identified for those individuals wishing to attain planning approval authority for nutrient management in Subpart A: Exhibit D. Other training may be substituted for listed training with approval from State Conservationist.

(6) Individuals certified as a Nutrient Management Specialist must complete 7 continuing education units (CEUs) every three years in Nutrient Management. Failure to complete the required CEUs could result in forfeiture of certification. Certified individuals must track their CEUs on Exhibit F – Continuing Education Units Tracking Form or a detailed CEU Statement from State approved certification programs and has it available at time of recertification review.

(7) Annual review of plans certified will be at the discretion of the State Conservationist or his designee to ensure quality planning.

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CO409.11(f)(8)

(g) Training

To provide conservation planning assistance on a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP), it is not required to be a Certified CNMP Specialist but for any plans to be approved they must be reviewed and signed by a Certified CNMP Specialist. Required training and knowledge has been identified for those individuals wishing to attain planning approval authority for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning Specialist in Subpart A: Exhibit D. Other training may be substituted for listed training with approval from State Conservationist.

(1) Annual review of plans certified will be at the discretion of the State Conservationist or his designee to ensure quality planning.

§ CO409.11 Minimum standards for providers of conservation technical assistance in Colorado associated with conservation planning that includes pest management.

(f) Additional minimum requirements in Colorado are:

(6) To provide conservation planning assistance in pest management it is not required to be a certified pest management specialist but for any plans to be approved they must be reviewed and signed by a Certified Pest Management Specialist. Required training and knowledge has been identified for those individuals wishing to attain planning approval authority for pest management in Subpart A: Exhibit D. Other training may be substituted for listed training with approval from State Conservationist.

7) Individuals certified as a Pest Management Specialist must complete 7.5 continuing education units (CEUs) every three years in Pest Management. Failure to complete the required CEUs could result in forfeiture of certification. Certified individuals must track their CEUs on Exhibit F – Continuing Education Units Tracking Form or a detailed CEU Statement from State approved certification programs and has it available at time of recertification review.

(8) Annual review of plans certified will be at the discretion of the State Conservationist or his designee to ensure quality planning.

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SUBPART A – EXHIBITS

§ CO409.20 Conservation Planner Certification – Exhibit A, Conservation Practice Certification – Exhibit B, Conservation Plan Review Worksheet – Exhibit C, Training Needs/Requirements Summary – Exhibit D, and Conservation Planning Specialist Certification – Exhibit E, Continuing Education Units Tracking Form – Exhibit F.